

Fightback

May 2013

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



**Racism in
Aotearoa/NZ
Teachers &
public education
under attack**

Massive tax haven leak

**The symbolic victory
of same-sex marriage**

ISSN 1177-074

\$1-\$2

Publication information

Becoming a sustaining subscriber

Subscriptions to *Fightback* are available for \$16.50 a year, this covers the costs of printing and postage. At present the writing, proof reading, layout, and distribution is all done on a volunteer basis. To make this publication sustainable long term we are asking for people to consider becoming 'Sustaining subscribers' by pledging a monthly amount to *Fightback* (suggested \$10). Sustaining subscribers will be send a free copy of each of our pamphlets to thank them for their extra support. The name of the magazine will change to *Fightback*, but current subscriptions will remain unaltered.

To start your sustaining subscription set up an automatic payment to 38-9002-0817250-00 with your name in the particulars and 'Sustain' in the code and email your name and address to byronccclark@gmail.com

Get Fightback each month

Within NZ: \$16.50 for one year (11 issues) or \$33 for two years (22 issues)

Rest of the World: \$20 for one year or \$40 for two years

Send details and payments to:

Fightback, PO Box 10282

Dominion Rd, Auckland

or

Bank transfer:

38-9002-0817250-01

Table of Contents

3	Editorial
3	In brief
4	State-Owned Enterprises: Public goods for private gain
6	Teachers and public education under attack
9	Racism in Aotearoa/NZ
12	Massive tax haven leak
14	"Work til you die" threatens bank commercial
15	Iceland: Become Part of the Heard
16	Iceland: There are no peaceful revolutions (a reply to Jessica Ward)
17	The symbolic victory of same-sex marriage
19	Sexism and "dude-bro irony"
21	Review: Marx in Soho
22	Margaret Thatcher dies
23	Ae Marika! Tribute to Mike Kyriazopoulos

Fightback 2013 conference

In 2012, Fightback (then the Workers Party) held its annual conference in Wellington and over 120 people attended. Over the weekend comrades discussed topics including tino rangatiratanga and socialism, safer spaces in political organising, industrial struggles, and the student movement.

This year's conference will be held on Queens Birthday Weekend, May 31 to June 1, at Newtown Community Centre in Wellington.

The conference will open with a Friday night panel on the international situation. Saturday's schedule features discussions of youth fightback, industrial perspectives, gender liberation, and building an anti-capitalist movement in Australasia, among other topics. On Sunday June 2 there will be writing workshop for Fightback members and others who want to contribute to our monthly magazine Fightback. Further details to come. For more information call Joel Cosgrove on 022-384-1917

Donations and bequeathments

Fightback is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous.) Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in Fightback from time to time.

Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

E d i t o r i a l

Welcome to the May 2013 issue of Fightback, newspaper of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback is a socialist organisation with branches in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

Over Queen's Birthday Weekend, the 31st of May to the 2nd of June, Fightback will be holding its annual public conference in Wellington. Turn to the back page or visit fightback.org.nz for more information.

In April, thousands rallied across Aotearoa against attacks on public schools. Fightback member Rebecca Broad covers the background of the dispute and argues the need for industrial action to defend and extend public education.

The campaign against further privatisation of power companies has also won some apparent victories lately, with the petition for a Citizens-Initiated Referendum achieving its goal of a non-binding referendum and with the Labour-Green opposition announcing a policy of bulk-buying power to reduce consumer prices. Fightback member Daphne Lawless argues the need for abolition of for-profit "State-Owned Enterprises," introduced by the fourth Labour government, in favour of democratic community control.

In late March, racist group Right Wing Resistance were outnumbered by an anti-racist rally in Christchurch. Fightback member Byron Clark discusses the role of mainstream racism in fostering racist views.

In the April issue of Fightback, we covered the "peaceful revolution" in Iceland, (<http://tinyurl.com/cu694hy>) arguing

while it has received little coverage in the capitalist press, it has conversely been exaggerated in some circles concerned with economic justice. Fightback reader Jessica Ward submitted an article for this issue, commending the inspirational nature of the struggle in Iceland. Fightback member Ian Anderson responds, contending that while the people of Iceland have won important concessions, international supporters have distorted the realities on the ground, the capitalist state in Iceland retains a monopoly on violence, and there are no "peaceful revolutions."

On April 17th 2013, a bill passed its final reading in parliament extending marriage rights to same-sex couples in Aotearoa/NZ. This was the result of decades of struggle by supporters of queer rights. In an article reprinted from Scoop, Anne Russell discusses the limitations of this reform for dispossessed queers, while acknowledging that it can act as a spur to further action.

Sexism (like other forms of oppression) is deeply embedded in the daily lived realities of capitalism. Fightback supporter Robyn Kenealy discusses the role of everyday humour and irony in both reinforcing, and undermining sexism.

We also reprint a piece by MANA leader Hone Harawira, paying tribute to our comrade Mike Kyriazopolous, a unionist and Fightback member.

In Brief

Aotearoa Not For Sale day of action

Fightback endorsed the Aotearoa Not for Sale national day of action against asset sales, on April 27th 2013. The day of action has already been endorsed by the Council of Trade Unions, Unions Auckland, Unite, the Mana Movement, Occupy and Socialist Aotearoa among others.

"The government is set on asset sales despite opposition from 80% of the general population, and 90% of tangata whenua," says Fightback member Ian Anderson. "We cannot take this passively, or vote and expect capitalist parties to represent us. We must fight in the streets, in workplaces and communities, to take control of assets." Fightback supports full nationalisation of assets under community control.

Wellington mayor Celia Wade-Brown shows her true colours

Green Wellington mayor Celia Wade-Brown showed her true colours in April when she voted for a plan to contract out street-cleaning jobs. The vote on contracting-out was tied 7-7, and Wade-Brown used her casting vote to proceed with the plan.

This concession to privatisation, by a Green Party mayor, stands in contrast to the party opposing privatisation in the asset sales campaign. This shows the need for revolutionary socialist organisation, in contrast to the wavering of the capitalist parties.

Fightback
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Monthly magazine
published by: **Fightback**

Fightback May 2013,
Vol.1, No 3, Issue No 3

Coordinating Editor

Byron Clark, Ian
Anderson

Proofing/Content

Jared Phillips

Layout:

Joel Cosgrove

Assisting Editors

Rebecca Broad, Mike
Kyriazopoulos, Kelly
Pope, Daphne Lawless,
Grant Brookes.

State-owned enterprises



State-Owned Enterprises: Public goods for private gain

by Daphne Lawless

Why does the New Zealand state own for-profit companies, anyway? We're taught at school that the purpose of state ownership is to enable economic planning and fulfil social welfare functions. But the State-Owned Enterprises of today aren't doing any such thing. In the last month, we've had announcements of at least 1000 jobs at Telecom, while Solid Energy have cancelled the \$10 million in funding they provide to West Coast communities (to compensate for the on-going despoliation of their environment).

Meanwhile, especially since the government abolished its Charter, Television New Zealand certainly has no public service character which distinguishes it from its commercial competitors. And with power prices for working families going through the roof, we certainly

don't get any benefit from state ownership of power generation.

The justification for the state hanging on to these large corporations is to keep them in "Kiwi" hands, and to pay the state a dividend on their investment. New Zealand has had a history of failed privatisation – both Air New Zealand and our national rail network had to be taken into public hands after being run down by their new private owners.

Why, then, are the National government so insistent on the part-privatisation of Mighty River Power, in the teeth of mass opposition? And why are they throwing a fit at the Labour/Green plan to bring in a "single buyer" of wholesale power? To understand this, we have to understand the real motives for the corporatisation and privatisation of state trading assets.

Corporatisation and privatisation

We are almost four decades into a slow-motion crisis of capitalism. The old Keynesian-interventionist consensus was based on the government, as collective capitalist, using its economic leverage to expand opportunities for profit for the capitalist classes. This "picking winners" and "demand management" approach is now strongly associated with the Muldoon government of 1975-84 – which happens to be the era when the strategy ran out of steam. All the government investment and administrative diktats in the world couldn't make the New Zealand economy profitable in the era of the oil shocks and "stagflation". What was needed was a new way for government to guarantee private sector profits.

The 1984-90 Labour Government pacified the left and the union movement

State-owned enterprises

with “social liberal” reforms on women’s rights, Tiriti o Waitangi issues, homosexual law reform and the anti-nuclear stance. This left them free to take a neoliberal machete to traditional models of welfare and public service. The old Keynesian consensus was dead – in particular, the idea of the State sector as a “sponge” to absorb excess labour from the market was doomed.

Labour politicians like Richard Prebble went around the country screaming about the amount of people employed by the railways and the state forestry service to do not very much. But this was always a social welfare issue, rather than a simple issue of business inefficiency. “Make work” schemes, money-losers though they be, encouraged social cohesion and passing on of skills from one generation of workers to another – they were also a payback to the unions for allowing real wages to be eaten away by inflation.

Efficiency for whom?

The massive shift in mentality in the neoliberal era came with the belief that mass unemployment was not a bad thing. Every worker paid to drink tea and play cards in some railway workshop was a worker who would not accept the low wages and “flexible” working conditions available in the private sector. The unexpressed motivation behind every neoliberal reform was to break working class power, and to drive down wages and conditions.

The long term goal, of course, was privatization – shifting public assets into the market economy so that they could improve the private sector’s profitability. But the country wasn’t ready to swallow full privatisation yet. So the Labour Government claimed that “corporatization” – reorganizing state services to work along exactly the same lines as a private corporation, complete with a profit motive and the need for competition – was an attempt to bring “efficiency” into the public sector, saving taxpayer

money. It was sold as an alternative to privatization... instead of, as eventually became clear, a first step towards it. Of course, no capitalist worth their salt would pay good money for an organization that wasn’t already corporately efficient, with a pacified labour force.

Very little has changed in the last 30 years in this score. The goal of “efficiency” in the public sector, leading to privatisation, is only marginally to do with saving scarce resources, or improving services for the public. What it really is about is, firstly, driving down wages and conditions for workers across the economy; and secondly, increasing the opportunities for private capitalists to make a profit in what used to be the public sector.

Private profits, public losses

A very important legacy of the wholesale destruction of the workers’ movement in the 1970s and 1980s – in New Zealand as elsewhere in the developed world – is that public sector unions were left mostly intact. As the crisis of capitalist profitability continues, the boss class get more desperate to drive down labour costs and smash unionisation – and the strong public sector unions have an upward pull on wages and conditions cross the economy. In other countries such as Ireland, the depth of the economic crisis has enabled the capitalist media to demonise the public sector as “greedy” for still having good wages and pensions while the private sector collapses. As if that were the fault of public sector workers, rather than private sector bosses who lost all control during the property boom.

Unlike the private sector, the public sector workforce can’t be disciplined by outsourcing jobs overseas. So the long-term solution is to, firstly, create an “internal market” to bring “discipline” to the workforce; and secondly, move as much of the public sector into the private sector. This combines with the second benefit – creating opportunities

for private profit.

The moribund ACT party’s signature success of charter schools has nothing to do with education standards – it has to do with people being able to make money by private provision of education. It has “worked” well in the tertiary sector, with all manner of fly-by-night academies and language schools dragging wages and conditions for instructors downwards.

The social status of the traditional universities with their inconvenient function of social critique is undermined, and a new generation of hospitality and IT workers is trained to fill the labour needs of the profit machine.

Even better are the famous “public-private partnerships”, which boil down to governments underwriting investments by private firms to make sure they can’t lose. A recent example of this is the Government offering subsidies to Rio Tinto aluminium not to shut down their smelter, which would make Mighty River Power much less profitable and therefore harder to sell. This has to be seen in the same light as the Government selling our labour laws to Warner Brothers over the Hobbit movies – increasingly, in the modern era, neoliberal governments are intervening like crazy to bail out capitalist profits, and using that as an excuse to slash and burn social spending.

NZ Power: A spanner in the works

And this is why Steven Joyce and the usual crowd of Nat suspects are screaming about the Labour/Green “NZ Power” plan. This plan would set up a single, state-owner purchaser of electric power from generators, which would then sell the power on to retailers, in the same way that Pharmac buys all New Zealand’s prescription drugs. This would prevent wholesale power prices being bidded up by competition among retail providers, and thus keep retail prices

Education attacks



down.

The way they're talking about it, this is North Korea, this is Albania, this is Stalinist gulag territory. In fact, California does exactly the same thing, so it's not exactly point 8 of the Communist takeover plan. What it does, though, is remove the opportunity for excess profits from the soon-to-be-privatised power companies. And – because the purpose of privatisation is to boost pri-

vate profits at public expense – this will defeat the whole purpose of the Mighty River sell-off.

Labour is capitalist party, that plays left while in opposition and either accepts or actively carries out neoliberal attacks while in government. That said, the Labour/Green proposal would be a real reform which would slow down the drive towards privatisation and stop price-gouging of working families.

Combined with the current mass campaigns against asset sales – including the Labour Party-sponsored mass petition – this is a very good start.

Workers should be running the public sector

We have to remember, though, that under capitalism, expanding the state sector isn't necessarily a good thing in itself. It's something of a historical accident that the public sector has stronger

Teachers and public education under attack

by Rachel Broad, Fightback Hamilton branch, Aotearoa/NZ. Originally published by the Socialist Party of Australia.

Teachers in New Zealand are facing a perfect storm. For the time being they have faced down government attempts to increase class sizes but have also had to contend with school closures and mergers in Christchurch and a move to introduce charter schools.

At the same time large numbers of teachers are going without pay or getting paid incorrectly thanks to the failure of their national payroll system. This is creating huge amounts of stress. Tensions are on the increase between teachers and the government, and the public are increasingly siding with the

teachers.

Government's failed attempt to increase class sizes

In mid 2012 the Ministry of Education attempted to introduce a new policy that would change teacher-student funding ratios in schools and would have increased class sizes and created job losses. Some school principals said that they would have to cut up to three jobs in each school if the policy was carried out. The student-to-teacher ratio would have been standardised at 27.5 students per teacher for year 2 to year 10 classes.

The policy was deeply unpopular. Some polls showed up to 89% of people in opposition to the policy. Teachers and

many members of the public rallied against the proposed changes.

The government tried to carry out the changes within both primary and secondary schools at the same time. Usually, using divide and rule tactics, the government has attacked the primary and secondary sectors separately. By attacking both sectors at the same time the government had bitten off more than they could chew and were forced to back down.

These events were the beginning of a sharp decline for Hekia Parata, the Minister of Education and puppet for the government's education plan. Parata was paraded by the ruling National Party as a high-flying Maori MP and was quickly promoted to cabinet.

During one teachers' meeting about



workers' rights. We know how badly Work and Income abuse their beneficiary and unemployed "clients" - but the life of a Work and Income frontline staff member, having to bear the brunt of public hatred for an inhumane system, isn't so great either.

And, even though the old "labour sponge" function of the public sector helped improve workers' rights across the economy, it was still a tragic waste of

the creativity and energy of those workers who didn't accomplish any socially useful labour.

So, we should demand that our assets not be sold; that our Government stop bailing out corporate profits and start bailing out working families at the real sharp end of the crisis; and we should support reforms which prevent the Government using our tax dollars to prop up private profits.

But we also need to demand also that the entire model of State-Owned Enterprises be abolished. Efficiency is a good goal - no resources or human labour should be wasted - but market efficiency is not what we want. We want social and environmental efficiency - and we want a democratic state sector, where workers are in control and not stifled by management and bureaucracy no different from that in the private sector.

class sizes where Parata was under constant fire she condescendingly lectured teachers by telling them that one of the main problems with the education system was not underfunding but that many teachers don't pronounce Maori and Pacific Island children's names correctly. Without hesitation this divisiveness was roundly rejected by broad layers from the Maori and Pacific Island communities. Parata is now deeply unpopular.

Christchurch school closures and mergers

Christchurch is the third largest city in New Zealand and its population is still reeling from the earthquake that killed 185 people in February 2011. Instead of fixing and reinstating all the primary schools the Ministry of Education sought to close 11 of them and merge

24.

In the aftermath of the earthquake the schools and teachers had acted as community hubs for families. Teachers went beyond the call of duty for their pupils, including by teaching through a double-bunking system whereby multiple schools would share one physical locality by starting classes early and finishing late.

The government's proposal was a slap in the face after everything the teachers had done. Parents and communities rallied around them in the face of the attacks. In December 2012 the NZ Education Institute (the teacher's union) announced that its Christchurch members had voted to go on strike in opposition to the closures and mergers.

The strike was scheduled for February 19 - the day after the government was scheduled to make its final announcement on the fate of the schools. In late

January teachers reaffirmed the strike vote. On February 18 the government announced that 7 schools were to be closed and 12 merged.

Unfortunately the strike was called off. This was a mistake given the other attacks on the sector that were in the pipeline. Instead a public rally was held with more than 1,500 people attending including parents, pupils and members of the public.

Charter schools and Novopay nightmare payroll system

As part of the coalition government deal between the National and Act parties (in which the junior partner is Act) National agreed to implement legislation allowing for charter schools. Essentially these are publically-funded but privately run schools that are exempt from the

Education attacks

checks and balances that apply to public schools.

The charter school system will divert public money to the education of the wealthy. The schools can be run by people with little or no education experience and the teachers will not have to be qualified. This will create downward pressure on the already meagre wages of teachers. In fact one of the key reasons for introducing the charter schools policy is to curb the influence of teacher's unions.

Another major issue confronting teachers is the nightmare of Novopay, the failed pay roll system which has been dogging teachers since it was introduced in August last year. In the first pay week 5000 teachers received the wrong pay and 15 received none.

Since then tens of thousands of teachers have received the wrong pay and 90% of schools have reported pay errors. Some individuals have gone for months without pay. Some people have also been overpaid. In one instance a teacher received \$39,000 NZD, returned the money, and was then forced to go

unpaid for two months! In March it was discovered that 100 teachers were wrongly designated to be terminated at the end of the first term. These are just a few examples of the problems teachers are being subjected to.

Many teachers who have been overpaid are being pursued by private debt collectors. As of February, 14,000 teachers and support staff were owed \$12,000,000 NZD dollars in back-pay. Some schools are using their own funds to pay teachers while a number of teachers are walking away from their jobs.

Strike action desperately needed

Fed up, teachers have voted for a nationwide day of action on Saturday April 13. They have stated that they are readying themselves to send a clear message to the government that they are united against the attacks on public education. While weekend protests can play a role, they will not be enough to beat the government back. National strike action will be required.

The union should tie the issues of school closures, charter schools and the payroll

system together and outline plans for an industrial and political campaign to defeat the government. While industrial action would be illegal under New Zealand employment law, these are laws that will have to be broken if we are to seriously defend public education.

If mass strike action was taken, it would be hard to see how the government could get away with imposing fines on tens of thousands of teachers who have persisted with incorrect pay, unpaid overtime and community support roles. There is overwhelming public support for teachers, and mass anger at the government's role. The union should take advantage of this mood and act quickly.

Ordinary people have a real interest in supporting the teachers struggle. Good quality public education is beneficial to everyone in society. Well paid teachers with good conditions deliver a better education to students. We need to fight to ensure that education is not seen by governments and profiteers as just another commodity. Free, good quality education from childcare to university should be a right that is enjoyed by all.



Students from Te Aro primary school join their teachers in a protest in Wellington



Racism in Aotearoa/NZ

by Byron Clark

On March 23rd Christchurch witnessed the spectacle of a white pride demonstration. In a Saint Albans park, with plans to march down Papanui road, approximately thirty people gathered, mostly young men, they wore military style garb, many of them adorned with swastikas. Organisers of the demonstration advertised it as a family friendly outing, advocating “white rights” and pride in one’s ethnicity, but the rank-and-file of the white nationalist movement didn’t want to leave their neo-Nazi regalia at home, and couldn’t resist the temptation to make sieg heil salutes.

The local community was out in force to oppose racism, around a hundred people gathered in a counter demonstration. Many of them residents of St Albans who wanted to make it clear that rac-

“ If we want to end racism, we need to start at the roots, and that means no longer giving space to racist views in the media, and speaking out about the racism of government and others in parliament.

ism is not welcome in their community and the white pride demonstrators did not represent their views. In a fact that should embarrass most of this city’s residents, Christchurch is only city in

Aotearoa with an active white supremacist movement. The Te Ara encyclopaedia entry on the city notes that a white supremacist subculture emerged here in the 1990s, and members of it would periodically attack ethnic minorities.

Although many of the people on the demonstration would have been just children at that time, white supremacy is still a violent movement today. In 2010 white supremacist Shannon Brent Flewellen was sentenced to life imprisonment in a Christchurch court for the brutal murder of South Korean student Kim Jae-Hyeon. The judge noted that Flewellen “regarded [the victim] as not deserving of the same dignity and respect as a white person.”

There was no outright violence at the recent white pride rally, although one of the demonstrators was arrested at the beginning of the demonstration

Fightback against racism

for a prior incident, and near the end a carload of white supremacists grabbed a sign from one of the counter-protesters as they drove past yelling “white pride!” injuring the woman’s arm. It’s no surprise that few people from ethnic minority groups joined the counter protest. While they would have agreed with its aims they would have been putting themselves at a greater risk than the Pakeha protesters.

Counter protestors successfully cut the white pride march short, blocking the footpath making the white supremacists change direction and return to the park. The action has solidified a core group of anti-racist activists, who have since held meetings to plan further anti-racist activities. It’s a big task, opposing racism means more than just opposing the Right Wing Resistance, the group behind March’s white supremacist rally.

No one is born racist. We need to be asking ourselves what it is about our society that has allowed a white-supremacist movement to grow in this Christchurch. Part of it is demographics, while in other cities the working class is made up largely of Maori and Polynesians, Christchurch still has a predominantly white working class. With unemployment high, and the state of many poorer suburbs following the earthquakes, it’s unsurprising that working class Pakeha are feeling abandoned, looking for something to join and someone to blame.

Understanding Racism

Groups like the Right Wing Resistance, and its forerunner the National Front, take racism to its most horrific extremes. But the road to white supremacy is paved with a softer racism that is more tolerated. No working class Pakeha would consider joining a neo-Nazi organisation if they had not already been indoctrinated with the myth of “Maori privilege” and a fear of outsiders.

The idea that Maori are privileged, at the expense of Pakeha, is perpetuated

by many of the opinion makers in this country. The Late Paul Holmes wrote that Maori “seem to exist in a perfect world of benefit provision...no one has to have a job and the Treaty is all that matters.” Adding that “we’ll end up paying the usual millions into the hands of the Maori aristocracy”

In reality, the average beneficiary is Pakeha, and treaty settlements made up a tiny percentage of government expenditure. Yet the meme of the privileged Maori has spread through talkback radio and the comment threads on Stuff.co.nz and no doubt reaches the ears of future white supremacists.

Racism in parliament

Anti-immigration views are aired in mainstream. For all Right Wing Resistance’s talk of “white rights”, white people actually have more rights in New Zealand than immigrants from predominantly non-white countries. Yet xenophobic rhetoric around immigration would have us believe otherwise. When NZ First Richard Prosser called for Muslim men to be banned from planes, his party leader would not endorse his views, yet as recently as 2005 Winston Peters was whipping up fear against Muslim immigration. In a speech titled ‘The end of Tolerance’ he said;

In New Zealand the Muslim community has been quick to show us their more moderate face, but there is a militant underbelly here as well...Underneath it all the agenda is to promote fundamentalist Islam - indeed these groups are like the mythical Hydra, a serpent underbelly with multiple heads, capable of striking at any time and in any direction.

At election time, the white supremacists endorse New Zealand First. While they are not responsible for what groups endorse them, it says something about New Zealand First that white suprema-

cists can comfortably call for a vote for them. While Right Wing Resistance is a fringe group, New Zealand First is supported by 1 in 20 New Zealanders, and promotes policies that RWR supports. Those voters need to think about the impact giving a platform to xenophobia is having.

When New Zealand First was in government we witnessed the bizarre spectacle of a Minister of Foreign Affairs who had built his political career on a hatred of foreigners. But the two major parties in parliament are not without blame. In the 1970’s the Labour government led by Norman Kirk began the “dawn raids” where Polynesians who had overstayed their work visas were rounded up at dawn and deported. These policies were continued and escalated significantly under the following National government led by Rob Muldoon. At the time, the majority of overstayers were not Polynesian, but British. In more recent times we have seen the imprisonment without trial of Algerian political refugee Ahmed Zaoui under the last Labour government. The current government has made a deal with Australia to take 150 asylum seekers per year; on the surface a progressive policy, though that 150 will come out of the quota of refugees New Zealand takes anyway, and those people will still have to wait for years in Australia or in an offshore centre under the “no advantage policy”. By making this deal, New Zealand has given an endorsement to Australia’s brutal policies toward refugees.

ACT should also receive a mention, while their sole MP arguably has less influence than the other parties mentioned, John Banks told *The Nation* that “If we continue the bankrupt response of just paying young Polynesian, young Maori men in South Auckland, the dole to sit in front of TV, smoke marijuana, watch pornography and plan more drug offending and more burglaries, then we’re going to have them coming through our window”

Fightback against racism



It is not just the easy targets like Kyle Chapman and the Right Wing Resistance, but people like NZ First MP Richard Prosser (left) and the recently deceased Paul Holmes (right) who need to be opposed if we are to overcome racist ideas and policies

ACT's largest donor last election was the multi-millionaire Southland property developer Louis Crimp who gave the party \$125,520 to do something about Maori, who were, in his words "either in jail or on welfare". Crimps attitude shows that racism is hardly a working class phenomenon.

Racism in the media

Of course no discussion of mainstream racism is complete without addressing the role of the media. Paul Henry. The 'controversial' broadcaster once asked John Key if then Governor-General Sir Anand Satyanand (born in Auckland to Indian-Fijian parents) was a New Zealander or not, then asking "Are you going to choose a New Zealander who looks and sounds like a New Zealander

this time?"

Henry was saying that real New Zealanders are white people and we shouldn't have someone who doesn't look and sound like a white person in one of the country's highest political offices. Henry always presented himself as an anti-establishment figure, flying the flag of the white male who had lost power to women and ethnic minorities. While actually a conservative, he appears as a rebel. Michael Laws with his talkback show fills a similar role.

Imagine now the unemployed Pakeha man in East Christchurch. He has learned that Maori are living the high life at the expense of the tax payer, too many immigrants are coming here and some of them might be terrorists and the country is now being run by people who don't even look and sound like real

New Zealanders. RWR leader Kyle Chapman didn't tell him those things; he learned them from people in parliament and the mainstream media.

Everyone has a right to free speech, but the right to free speech is not the same as the right to a platform for that speech. There is good reason that Kyle Chapman doesn't write a column in *The Press*, yet ideas not dissimilar from his own are given a huge audience. If we want to end racism, we need to start at the roots, and that means no longer giving space to racist views in the media, and speaking out about the racism of government and others in parliament.

Tax havens

Massive tax haven leak

by Byron Clark

Members of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) including Nicky Hagar, have spent the past 15 months working through a cache of 2.5 million leaked files full of information on the people using off shore tax havens- foreign jurisdictions one can use to avoid paying tax on their income. According to ICIJ:

The leaked files provide facts and figures, cash transfers, incorporation dates, links between companies and individuals that illustrate how offshore financial secrecy has spread aggressively around the globe, allowing the wealthy and the well-connected to dodge taxes and fuelling corruption and economic woes in rich and poor nations alike.

The documents mostly concern the British Virgin Islands but the Cook Islands also feature prominently. This has put Cook Island authorities on the defensive, Jennifer Davis from the Cook Islands Financial Services Authority told One News:

The media and information that we've seen come out ... in relation to this matter seems to presume that anyone using the services or structures of the international finance centres are dodgy and that is simply not the case.

Island nations often face limited development opportunities because of their small population and land area, so legislation giving them 'tax haven' status is seen as a method of attracting foreign capital. In 2002 The Economist described the main asset of these countries as the right to write the laws- something the Cook Islands did in the early 1980s, following lobbying from Austral-

“ Island nations often face limited development opportunities because of their small population and land area, so legislation giving them 'tax haven' status is seen as a method of attracting foreign capital. In 2002 The Economist described the main asset of these countries as the right to write the laws- something the Cook Islands did in the early 1980s, following lobbying from Australian and New Zealand business people. Today financial services are second only to tourism in the nation's economy.

ian and New Zealand business people. Today financial services are second only to tourism in the nation's economy.

New Zealanders – that is, those New Zealanders with wealth significant enough to make using a tax haven worthwhile- began to take advantage of the Cook Islands after the removal of financial institution regulations and foreign exchange controls, as well as the liberalisation of the banking sector in New Zealand that occurred during the era of neoliberal reforms referred to as 'Rogernomics'

One of the organisations the leaks have come from was set up by Former New Zealand lawyer Mike Mitchell, who was the Cook Islands solicitor-general in the early 1980s and main government adviser as the tax haven was established, before resigning to establish what was then called Pacific Trustee Company, now TrustNet.

TrustNet has continued to be staffed by many New Zealanders. The company has an office on Auckland's North Shore. For 14 years the company was majority-owned by the Spencer family. John Spencer was New Zealand's richest man in the 1980s and still incredibly wealthy, his son Berridge and daughter Mertsy were both National Party donors in 2005. TrustNet markets itself today as the largest independent offshore services company in Asia.

Documents show TrustNet has a business relationship between BNZ and ANZ, with bank staff routinely helping TrustNet move money in and out of its clients' offshore bank accounts at branches in Singapore and the Cook Islands respectively. This demonstrates that despite widespread concern over "foreign ownership" around issues such as asset sales, ownership by New Zealand capitalists is no indication that money will "stay in the country".

The secrecy and anonymity associated

Tax havens

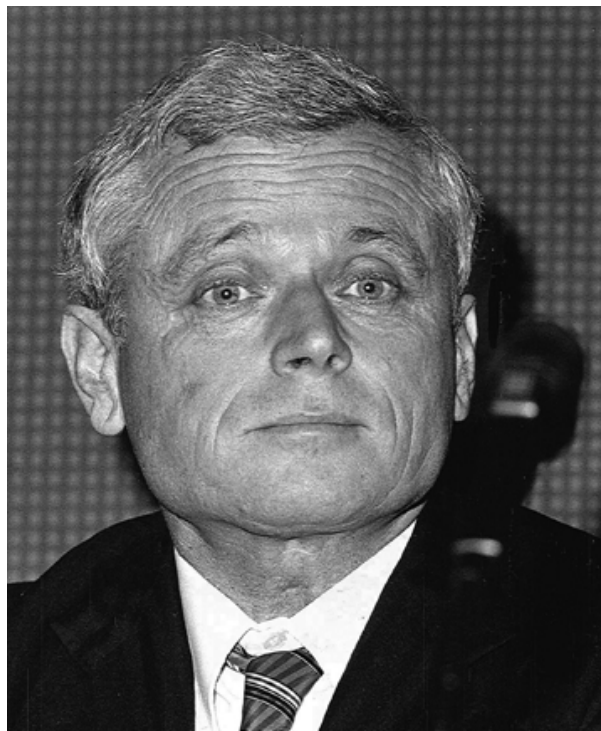


Government officials and their families and associates in Azerbaijan, Russia, Canada, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Mongolia and other countries have embraced the use of covert companies and bank accounts. Some of New Zealand's richest individuals and families have repeatedly been implicated as well.

with tax havens has led to criticism relating to their use by corrupt politicians and fraudsters. This sort of activity does appear to be wide spread, the leaked documents show individuals and companies linked to Russia's 'Magnitsky Affair', a tax fraud scandal and a Venezuelan deal maker who is accused of using offshore entities to bankroll a U.S.-based Ponzi scheme as well as funnelling bribes to a Venezuelan government official. Indonesian billionaires with ties to the late dictator Suharto have also made use of tax havens. Suharto enriched a small circle of elites during his decades in power.

ICIJ's examination has also identified 30 American clients accused in lawsuits or criminal cases of fraud, money laundering or other serious financial misconduct. They include ex-Wall Street titans Paul Bilzerian, a corporate raider who was convicted of tax fraud and securities violations in 1989, and Raj Rajaratnam, a billionaire

hedge fund manager who was sent to prison in 2011 in one of the biggest insider trading scandals in U.S. history.



New Zealander John Spencer is one of the richest people in NZ and a key element in global tax havens.

In the mid 1990's tax havens were at the centre of tax evasion schemes that became the subject of the 'Winebox'

inquiry. These schemes involved some of New Zealand's most powerful companies such as The Bank of New Zealand, Brierleys and Fay Richwhite.

Undoubtedly there are enormous amounts of dubious activity going on in the network of small island states and banks.

However, most customers of the financial services offered by tax havens are using offshore accounts "legitimate" purposes, such as escaping the "rules and red tape" of onshore jurisdictions. While tax evasion is a crime, tax avoidance is "best practice" for businesses and at present perfectly legal.

Far from just being a white collar criminal underworld, tax havens have become an integral part of global capitalism. Tax Justice Network, an international research and advocacy group estimates a third of the world's wealth is held in tax havens,

with a majority of world trade moving through them.

Superannuation

“Work til you die” threatens bank commercial

by Byron Clark

It's not often that a bank invokes the spectre of death in its advertising – outside of life insurance plans at least. The National Bank came close when it used a few bars from The Verve's Bitter Sweet Symphony in its commercials. The lyrics, not heard in the commercials, intone “you're a slave to money and then you die”. Fitting perhaps, but hardly something that will attract customers.

The Bank of New Zealand (BNZ) has thought differently, with its new advertising jingle “I'm going to work till I die.” The song has aired on The Rock and Radio Hauraki notably two stations whose audience is at work, the former having a “no repeat work day” (which of course refers to songs- advertising, such as “I'm going to work till I die” repeats over and over throughout the work day.)

Four different versions of the song exist, geared toward different occupa-

tions. One song includes “I'm gonna be a builder till I'm 94, Knocking down walls and laying floors.” While a white collar version mentions being in middle management until age 83. The other two versions target dentists and cleaners. At the beginning of its run, these commercials didn't even state what was being advertised (and who could guess?) but later airings revealed it was for a BNZ KiwiSaver scheme.

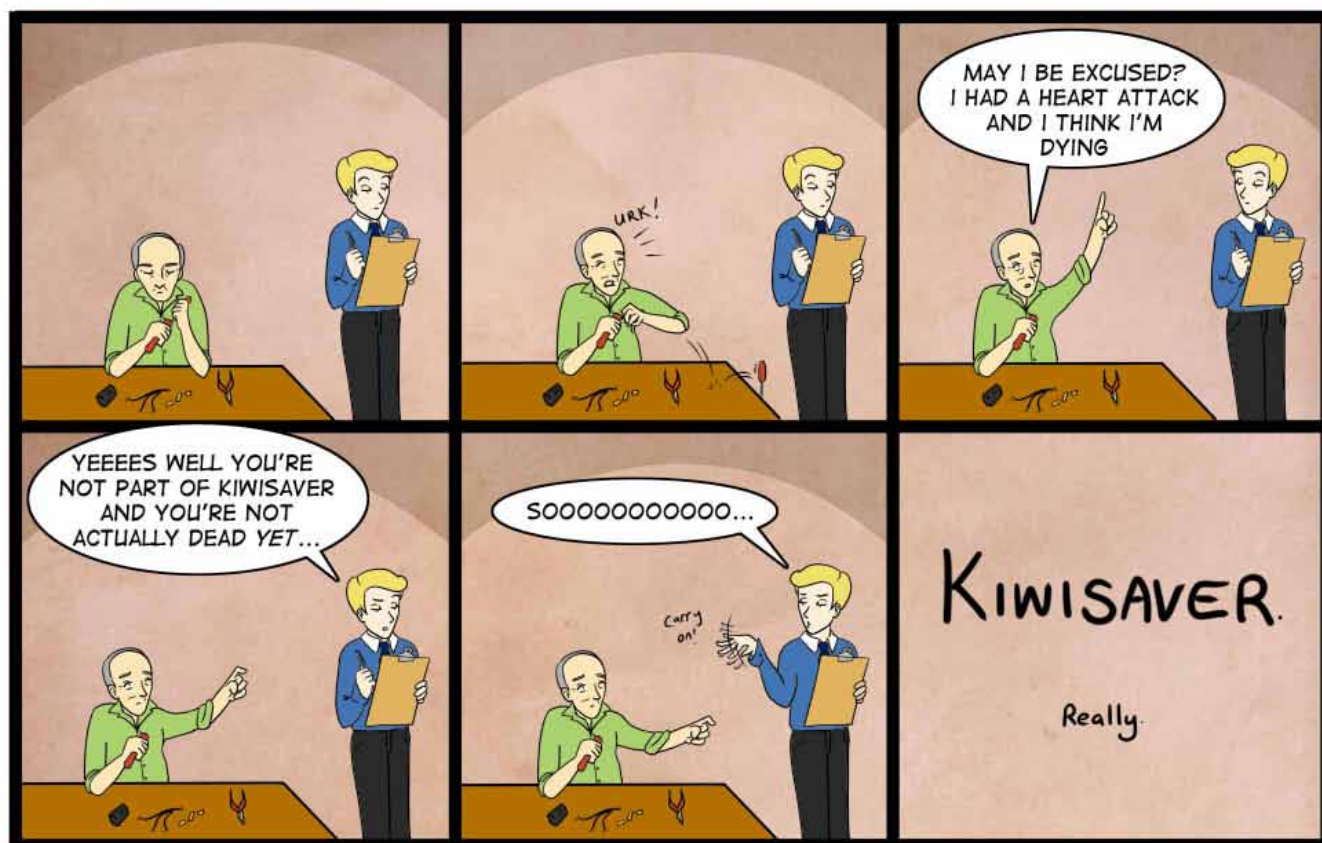
“There's no guarantee that New Zealand Superannuation will provide for you at its current levels when it's your time to retire,” reads the BNZ website. This is not inaccurate; future governments could reduce or restrict entitlements to superannuation, just as the current government has for student allowances and domestic purposes benefits (superannuation is a bigger share of the welfare budget than these and all other benefits combined).

What BNZ fails to mention however

is something you can read on the official Kiwisaver website: “KiwiSaver is not guaranteed by the Government. This means you make your investment choices in a KiwiSaver scheme at your own risk.”

Unsurprisingly many have found the commercial offensive. A hundred people die in the workplace every year in New Zealand, and the thought of continuing to work until death is not a pleasant one. “The fact that you mock me incessantly with your “I'm going to work till I die” radio advert is a choice your company has made. It is a very poor one”, Read a letter to The Press. The BNZ Facebook page attracted similar comments; “you have really missed the mark with your current ad campaign. Not funny at all” and “polarizing your entire customer base as idiots who can't save...I already put my savings into another bank.”

Don't expect to hear these commercials for much longer.



Cat Kane '13

Iceland: Become part of the heard

This article by Jessica Ward was submitted to Fightback, in response to an article published in the April issue (Iceland's "peaceful revolution" – myth and reality, <http://tinyurl.com/cu694hy>). A reply to Jessica's article can be found on page 16.

In today's world it is easy to become disillusioned. It is too easy to concede to the idea we are incapable of changing the world, to give into the apathy that plagues our generation. We are not the flower children of the 60s, we misguidedly believe that unlike days gone by no one else is angry, no one else is enraged by the disparity of wealth and incensed by politics, economics and the injustices of society. We are alone. We are all alone. Aren't we?

Today I had the opportunity of listening to Hordur Torfason at the Dunedin School of Art. It may seem a strange place for an activist and leader of the Icelandic Revolution to give a talk but all becomes clear when listening to the ideas and attitudes of this artist. Torfason stressed in his talk the need for creative solutions, the importance of art as a way of activating people and bringing them together and of protest as a form of performance, as a way of intriguing an audience of public and media.

Torfason believes that it is the role of the artist to criticize society and remember the importance of the unseen forces that dictate us, our feelings. Art has the ability to move us, to affect us, in the words of Torfason to activate us.

We live in the age of the internet: a tool to both communicate and organize. We are the 99% and we have a way of communicating, coming together and organizing action. In a world where the media is a tool owned by the 1% to systematically ensure their wealth the internet is our tool to counter it. In the age of information there is no excuse to

not have a voice (given you have access to the internet of course). Communication is also highly important in the organization of revolution or protest. It is important to ask the people what they want and to listen.

Hordur Torfason is an eloquently spoken man. He wore an orange handkerchief protruding from his breast pocket as a symbol of the peaceful revolution where those who believed in peaceful means wore orange to show their support. Hordur Torfason was the first openly gay man in Iceland in 1973. After enjoying a successful career as an actor, director and musician he was forced into exile. Hordur Torfason humbly talked about how he considered taking his own life. Iceland used to be an exceedingly homophobic country where it was common place to beat gay people and the media ensured the propaganda that all gay people were criminals and pedophiles. Hordur Torfason did not give up (thankfully). He used his anger constructively and continued travelling back to Iceland to talk and to listen and to try and change people's attitudes. Eventually he was able to move back to Iceland and created its first gay organization with gay people eventually receiving equal rights in 2008.

Hordur Torfason has a long history of activism. He is not associated with any political party and believes in complete transparency to the point he created a webpage to show the economic backers of the Icelandic revolution and the people of Iceland how and where the money was being spent.

The Icelandic Revolution succeeding in forcing the entire parliament and the National Bank's Board of Directors to resign. These members of parliament as well as the bank directors are being tried for their crimes against the people. It is the role of the politicians to serve the people not the other way around as

Hordur Torfason stresses.

Creativity played a vital role in the Icelandic Revolution. It was used to create tension and intrigue. In the protest pre-christmas of 2008 silence played a seminal role. A small group of protestors gathered outside parliament on behalf of the people who were enjoying time with their families over the festive season. The group of protestors were silent to reflect the silence of the government in response to the revolutionaries demands that they resign. This silence acted as a caesura before the "real" protest started. Under criticism from the media over the ineffectiveness of the revolution Torfason announced that so far the protests had simply been "practices". He did not say anything else other than telling the people who were in favour of the government resigning to bring pots and pans to the next protest which was planned for after the holidays. Torfason instructed the crowd to make as much noise as possible outside of parliament and systematically continued this action every day until midnight until the entire parliament and the bank's board of directors all resigned. This is why the Icelandic Revolution is sometimes referred to as the "Cutlery Revolution."

Art has a long history of becoming intertwined with politics. Art over the last twenty years has increasingly occupied public spaces. Artists in response to the ubiquitous world of advertising are moving art out of the gallery and into the streets, our homes and our communities. Creative solutions to political issues can effect the lives of the audience and in some cases cause real change. Two examples of this are Ithica Hours, a form of local labour backed currency in Ithica, New York and Gurana Power.

Ithica Hours began in 1991, invented by Peter Glover is a labour based form of currency which keeps economic wealth within the community and allows

International

people with specialist skills to receive payment for these skills. In an interview with Nilsa Garcia-Rey for Reaity Sanwich Glover gives advice on how to create your own local currency saying to “make it look both majestic and cheerful, to reflect your community’s best spirit. Feature the most widely respected monuments of nature, buildings, and people...Ithaca has used local hand-made paper made of local weed fiber but recently settled on 50/50 hemp/cotton. Design professionally -- cash is an emblem of community pride.” Ithaca Hours is another way in which crea-

tive solutions are successfully making a difference politically as is Superflex’s Guarana Power.

In 2003 as a response to the cartel whose monopoly on the purchase of guarana drove the price paid to farmers down by 80% Superflex in collaboration with a guarana farmers cooperative worked together and produced the Guarana Power soft drink. On their website Superflex describe their intention as “to use global brands and their strategies as raw material for a counter-economic position, and to reclaim the

original use of the Maués guaraná plant.” Guarana Power is an intervention in the global economy, creating a real life opposition to a powerful cartel which has driven prices for guarana down from \$25 per kilo to \$4 per kilo in four years despite their products remaining the same price for consumers.

There is hope. Creative solutions in response to inequality are being employed all over the world. We are all capable of thinking creatively, making some noise and becoming ourselves, a part of the heard.

Iceland: There are no peaceful revolutions (a reply to Jessica Ward)

This article, by Fightback member Ian Anderson, is a reply to Jessica Ward’s article Iceland: Become part of the heard

This article is not a criticism of the people of Iceland, it’s a criticism of the way their story has been told. Globally circulated articles and memes have made extraordinary and only partially true claims; that Iceland’s constitution was rewritten by the people, that they have deposed their government, that they’re undergoing a total economic revolution.

For example, Jessica’s article claims that “members of parliament as well as the bank directors are being tried for their crimes against the people.” While it is true that some bankers have been jailed, members of parliament were cleared of charges.

In his speaking tour, Hordur Torfason conceded that parliamentary capitalist order had largely been restored in Iceland. However, he said that the movement had raised “awareness.” While awareness is important, critical thought is necessary to developing revolutionary consciousness and activity.

While the people have won concessions, the capitalist government of Iceland remains intact. As explained in an earlier Fightback article, (Iceland’s “peaceful revolution” – myth and reality, <http://tinyurl.com/cu694hy>) parliament was restored to power and is now directing the constitutional process. The right-wing parties have regained influence and may win in 2013, according to supporters of the constitutional process (<http://tinyurl.com/cjkwm6x>).

Narratives of a “peaceful revolution” prevail. Torfason underlines that movement leaders intervened to stop protestors from clashing with police. However, police have inflicted violence on protestors. There is no such thing as a peaceful revolution.

The capitalist state in Iceland retains a monopoly on violence. The police, and the army, hold the arms and enforce capitalist domination. When previous revolutions have not addressed the capitalist state’s monopoly on violence, they have been drowned in blood.

In Chile 1971, Salvador Allende was the first Marxist to be elected to national presidency in a capitalist state. Chile

saw sweeping nationalisations and social programs, under the slogan “The Chilean way to socialism.”

In Chile 1973 however, a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet, and backed by the West, restored full state power to the capitalist class. Over the following years Pinochet’s government killed and disappeared thousands of dissidents. This is why Venezuela’s Chavez said of the Chilean revolution: “Like Allende, we’re pacifists and democrats. Unlike Allende, we’re armed.”

Right now throughout most of the Western world, non-violent civil disobedience makes tactical sense. In Aotearoa/NZ, we are nowhere near seizing power for the people; the Icelandic people may have come closer to this goal, but they have not achieved it. We must not lie to ourselves. If there is any chance of the masses holding democratic socialist power, this will mean overthrowing the capitalist state.



The symbolic victory of same-sex marriage

This article by Anne Russell was originally published on Scoop

Over the past year or so, the marriage equality bill has essentially served as a filter through which New Zealand has discussed queer sexuality and gender identity. Marriage is perhaps one of the least threatening manifestations of contemporary queer identity, reassuring all but the most raving queerphobes that queendom does not, in fact, destroy the fabric of society as we know it. Many of the speeches made in Parliament opined that there were no reasons not to support marriage equality. National MP Maurice Williamson has made international news for his speech, for which 3News has labeled him an “unlikely gay icon”.

Unlikely indeed, given his position in a historically queerphobic party, combined with his own emphasis on what a minor law change it is. The public demonstrations of gratitude to Williamson and his right-wing colleagues show how little the queer community has come to expect from politicians. It also demonstrates the extent to which marriage equality has co-opted queer struggles in the West. At this juncture, it's far more common to hear straight allies in the public sphere proclaiming their support

“ The prioritisation of marriage ignores the fact that much of queer oppression exists independently of the practice of intimate relationships—getting beaten up or fired for one's non-normative appearance, the dearth of queer sex education or history in schools, and the internal repression of desire.

for marriage equality than for queer equality.

The widespread, cross-party support for marriage equality has partly materialised because it allows most politicians to

walk a comfortable ideological middle ground. Progressives and the queer community will be pacified somewhat by the inclusion of queers into certain areas of society, but some conservatives may also feel reassured when queendom is normalised and publicly confined to traditional institutions like exclusive monogamy. Economically speaking, the business sector receives more opportunities to market towards the queer demographic; tourism companies are already rolling out the rainbow welcome mat. The 77-44 vote demonstrated that opposition to marriage equality is not an easy political position to maintain.

Owing to the nature of both legislation and the media, the queer movement, like any other demographic, typically needs focal events to rally popular support. Single-issue queer politics can make it difficult to maintain an ongoing public discussion of queer rights. The debate around marriage equality has managed to keep queer issues in the media spotlight, which may fade as the queer movement catches its breath.

After all, this bill in itself is not a victory for all queers. The proposition that same-sex marriage will have knock-on benefits for lower-class queers is no more than queer trickle-down theory, an excuse to direct extensive activist forces primarily at middle-class issues. The pri-

Same-sex marriage



DON'T LIKE GAY MARRIAGE?
Don't have one. Problem solved.

"Many arguments in favour of same-sex marriage rights are fundamentally conservative, stifling wider radical discussions of gender, relationships and sexuality."

oritisatation of marriage ignores the fact that much of queer oppression exists independently of the practice of intimate relationships—getting beaten up or fired for one's non-normative appearance, the dearth of queer sex education or history in schools, and the internal repression of desire. Many queers who are at highest risk of violence and death may not ever make it to an intimate relationship, let alone have the worry of what they call their partners.

But a few more may survive thanks to the public process of enacting the legislation. The main victory of the marriage equality debate was to highlight queer identity and relationships and treat them as legitimate. It has given some queers the courage to come out to their communities, and convinced some straight people to support them. The obviousness of the bill could arguably

become a strength, as many straight allies have newly noticed the ridiculousness of denying people equal rights on the basis of queer identity. If queer rights activism continues to focus on the family, many more people may start attacking more urgent inequalities, such as the rates of queer youth homelessness in this country.

It will be interesting to see where the queer movement goes next. The marriage equality bill represents a symbolic and semantic change, rather than a transformation of the material conditions of people's lives. Action like queer-ing education policy across the board, allocating tax dollars to transgender healthcare, making bathrooms gender neutral, and enabling adoption rights requires redistribution of power and material resources. Moreover, issues like poverty and poor housing, that

were arguably sidelined by the marriage equality debate, disproportionately affect the queer community and need queer attention.

As such, it may be much harder to convince queerphobes that further political action won't affect them personally. Future political framing will hopefully not end up permitting queerphobes to exercise their oppressive ideology at all. However the marriage equality debate was framed, it is undeniable that extreme queerphobia lost this round. Congratulations to all the queers and their allies who worked on getting this bill through.



Sexism and “dude-bro irony”

Top Gear presenters Richard Hammond, Jeremy Clarkson and James May “three rich, middle-aged men... [who] have this strange notion that if they are being offensive it bestows on them a kind of anti-establishment aura of coolness; in fact, like their leather jackets and jeans, it is uber-conservative.”

by Robyn Kenealy

Some of you will be familiar with British comedian Stewart Lee’s routine about motoring review show Top Gear. In the routine, Lee describes acts of horrible violence befalling the Top Gear presentation team, breaking off periodically to shout “it’s just a joke, like on Top Gear!” before pausing for a moment, and then adding “but coincidentally, it is actually what I wish had happened.”[1]

It’s a great routine. Lee uses, as he explains, “the rhetoric and implied values of Top Gear to satirize the rhetoric and implied values of Top Gear.” Top Gear which is, to quote Steve Coogan of Alan Partridge and Saxondale fame, “three rich, middle-aged men... [who] have this strange notion that if they are being offensive it bestows on them a kind of anti-establishment aura of coolness; in fact, like their leather jackets and jeans, it is uber-conservative.” [2]

I have a reason for bringing up British comedians making criticisms of Top Gear, I promise. Particularly, it’s that those criticisms, Lee’s and Coogan’s, seem to me to also apply to what I call Dudebro Irony (I doubt the term is original with me). Dudebro Irony is when people – when men – say overtly sexist things, either in conversation or in art works, with the assumption that everyone will understand that they are not intending to be sexist. That it’s just a joke. Like on Top Gear.

Top Gear’s values are overtly conservative, whereas Dudebro Irony’s values are liberal or even leftist, but I would – and in fact will – argue that a similar machinery is at work. Rather than a conservative attack against the “PC police” which all leftists may by now easily denounce when they watch Top Gear, Dudebro Irony is done by young, liberal or leftist men, who ironically perform sexism (this is the literal sense of the word irony: their words have the opposite meaning to their intention)

as part of a statement that they are not only not sexist, but so profoundly not sexist that the very idea of their issuing a sexist statement is so impossible as to be laughable. This performance has a relationship to Hipster Racism, which Lindy West writing for Jezebel examples as “introducing your black friend as “my black friend”—as a joke!!!—to show everybody how totally not preoccupied you are with your black friend’s blackness.”[3] While not directly analogous, Dudebro Irony often appears in the same contexts and does come from a similar root: the assumption that everybody now lives in a gloriously post-isms world, and therefore any overt display of -ism is automatically ironic.

We don’t live in a post-oppression world. We live in a world that is built on, and sustained by entrenched structural oppression. For example, women still perform the bulk of unpaid labour, which is reinforced by the popular internet meme “make me a sandwich.” As such, as a rule, if I don’t know a man

Ironic bigotry

very well, I'm unlikely to assume that he is being ironic when he says something sexist to or about me, especially if he gives me no formal clues that he is joking and no option to opt out of the joke. The statistical evidence provided by my life so far has not set me up to expect that that a sexist statement is ironic, but rather to expect that it is completely serious, and to be followed by profound professional and social consequences.

Repeating or building an artwork around an oppressively sexist statement "as a joke," on the assumption that everybody knows you're a good guy (how?) and that nobody has ever in their life heard such statements for real is a complicated move. Suffice it to say that at its most basic level, Dudebro Irony is most often an expression of male privilege, and it is one that has a high chance of playing into oppressive structures of misogyny and sexism. Quite often, too, I suspect it of masking real misogyny and sexism, and of being every bit as conservative as the Top Gear version of "just a joke," though with some strange lacquer of liberal hipness that renders it resistant to interrogation.

Still, whether Dudebro Irony is or it isn't genuine sexism is somewhat irrelevant. The onus shouldn't be on me to interpret ironic sexism "correctly" when no responsibility is placed on the issuing party to convey it comprehensibly. At an interpersonal level, sure, I take some responsibility for interpretation, but at a broader social level, where Dudebro Irony is in common and appropriate usage between complete strangers, I am less inclined to assume it is a hilarious joke. Especially when the joke fails and someone complains; then, instantly, it's women who are expected to "have a sense of humor," never the Dudebro Ironist who is expected to "take a little criticism," or maybe even to "tell a better and slightly more comprehensible joke next time."

It scarcely seems necessary to point out that this reaction, rooted as it is in the assumption that a woman's anger is too

much, is groundless or irrational, or too personal by virtue of its being rooted in something specific to women, is about as sexist as reactions come. More so when criticism is met with cries that views or artwork are being censored. Criticism and stated offense are not the same thing as censorship, and behaving as if they are speaks volumes about where power lies in the Dudebro Irony equation. Particularly, if you've expected to be able to release an opinion to the world without any criticism at all, you may be reasonably assured that you are the powerful party. And of course women's reactions to sexism are personal; every response to speech is personal because everybody is people, but it is one of the conditions of structural oppression that some personhoods are more equal than others.

Herein lies the bleak irony-ception of Dudebro Irony's existence: it produces a supposedly anti-sexist dialogue that is tailored around the comfort levels and amusement of men. Steve Coogan, addressing Top Gear's use of racist jokes, notes that casual -isms are "arguably the most sinister kind." As he writes, "it's easy to spot the ones with the burning crosses," and perhaps an even finer distinction can be made here: it's easy to spot a conservative baddie, harder to spot a generally liberal person being a bit of a douche. One of the conditions of being on the privileged end of an oppressive dynamic is that it's not only overt, intentional actions of bigotry and prejudice that work in the service of that oppression, but banal, daily repetitions of the fact that you are the one who ought to be provided with the space to speak – about anything, including, if not especially, experiences that do not apply to you – and the right to demand to be correctly understood.

But, since we're throwing around ironies, the irony of this situation is that I understand the desire to make jokes about volatile material, and that's precisely what makes Dudebro Irony so irritating. To my mind, the more serious

the situation is, the more important it is to satirize it. Satire is required in the dismantling of oppressive structures. That is in fact quite literally what satire is for: the critique of power in a manner that can be widely understood and easily transmitted, as well as pleasurable and invigorating for those in opposition to that power. But to refer again to Steve Coogan's criticism of Top Gear, a good joke is a joke at the expense of power, while a bad joke is a joke at the expense of the powerless. Coogan puts it like this, "There is a strong ethical dimension to the best comedy. Not only does it avoid reinforcing prejudices, it actively challenges them."

The key word here is actively. This is not to deny that there are contexts where close friends know each other intimately, in which long-established and deeply personalized patterns of gallows humor will call for ironic sexism between friends. Sometimes, that will be a good joke; the verbal equivalent of touching fingers to let your friend know that you see the same problem that they do. But Dudebro Irony is not a good joke. Making sexist statements ironically – making a joke that really, in essence is pretty much the sentence "hey, sexism exists," but without demonstrating the understanding that that sexism is already obvious to every woman in the room, not to mention demanding that your audience immediately and without preparation understand that you are the first man in 2,000 years of patriarchy who has never, ever been sexist – really does make it sound like sexism is, coincidentally, what you actually wish had happened.

[1] Routine presented during Lee's 2009 "If You Prefer a Milder Comedian, Please Ask" tour.

[2] 'Top Gear's offensive stereotyping has gone too far, says Steve Coogan' in The Guardian, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2011/feb/05/top-gear-offensive-steve-coogan>

[3] A Complete Guide to 'Hipster Racism' in Jezebel, 2012. <http://jezebel.com/5905291/a-complete-guide-to-hipster-racism>

Review: Marx in Soho



Written by: Howard Zinn

Performed by: Brian Jones

Venue: University of Melbourne Student Union

Reviewed by: Joel Cosgrove

“Don’t you wonder why it is necessary to declare me dead again and again?” asks Brian Jones in his performance as Karl Marx in *Marx In Soho*, a part of the Marxism Conference at Melbourne University.

The premise of the play is that Marx has been granted an hour to return to earth from heaven to argue his case and clear his name against over one hundred and fifty years of confusion and bastardization of his ideas by both supporters and opponents of his ideas. The twist being that instead of returning to Soho, London, he ends up in Soho, New York. With as much reflection on the 21st century as much as the 19th century that Marx inhabited.

Sitting on the sparse (but smartly laid out) stage, Marx reflects from his desk “Is there anything more boring than reading political economy? Writing it.” And proceeds to give an exposition of his ideas and his life. Drawing on being deported across Europe stating, “It seems the police develop an international consciousness long before the working class” as he ends up in London.”

Living in poverty, in part a result of Marx’s focus on writing (apart from occasional journalism assignments the

only job Marx ever had was as a rail clerk, but he wasn’t offered the job when it became apparent that his handwriting was illegible.). Jones as Marx details the struggles his family went through, the deaths of a number of his children, the anguish and pain is something felt dearly from the stage.

This is a play that on one hand has a dense yet accessible account of Marx’s politics, but the heart of the play is a personal humanizing reflection on the relationship between Marx and his wife Jenny. Jenny Marx is someone who is often left out of discussions of Marx and Engels. Yet here figuratively she takes centre stage. Jones as Marx rages at their arguments, lauds her for her piercing intellect and studious work transcribing his illegible notes and is honest about his flaws and the struggles that he put her through. A key aspect of the play that makes it so enjoyable is the strongly feminist aspect, an almost defence of the role of Jenny played, subtly but clearly critiquing what is often labeled on the internet as ‘brocialism’.

The two aspects of the play which come together so beautifully are Howard Zinn’s excellent script and Brian Jones’ consummate performance. Zinn, a prolific radical writer and educator, best known for his bestselling work *A People’s History of the United States* produced in 1999 what is a deep and intelligent portrayal of Marx the political theorist and Marx as an individual, that gets across a dense amount of information in a surprisingly accessible and absorbable manner. Like the best theatre (or

episode of *Sesame Street*), it teaches and informs without the audience realizing necessarily realizing. Primarily it is funny and entertaining.

In an interview speaking about his experience performing the play, Jones had the following to say:

“The secret: Zinn has a deep respect for his audience, and they know it. You feel it instantly when you meet him. He speaks and writes not to impress, but to stimulate. He never talks down to you, never writes in language you can’t understand to make him seem smarter. Making complicated ideas clear as glass, rescuing socialism from Stalin, and, yes, giving us a vision of Karl Marx that actually makes us laugh...these are the products of Zinn’s excellent method.”

It is Brian Jones who takes Zinn’s script and completes it as a live performance. It is Jones, 25 when he first started performing the play (he has been performing it since Zinn wrote it with him in mind in 1999), an African-American who so deeply embodies the eccentricities and humanism of the German revolutionary Marx.

The audience was the perfect one for this play. Densely layered with jokes and asides about Marx, Marxism and the wider history that Marx’s ideas inhabit. You don’t need to know all these intricacies, but it definitely helped on the night!

International

Margaret Thatcher dies

by Byron Clark

On April the 8th former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher died at the age of 87. Described by media as a “controversial figure” Thatcher was possibly Britain’s most loathed politician. Her death was celebrated with street parties and Glasgow and Brixton, and following a social media campaign Brits purchased the song “Ding Dong The Witch is Dead” in an effort for it to be the number one hit on the charts the week of her death.

While she left office in 1990, few have forgotten her decade in power. The Thatcher led government enacted a series of neoliberal economic reforms, the likes to which soon became vogue around the world as the end of the long economic boom following World War II meant that capitalism was no longer productive enough to provide a welfare state. The tax burden was shifted from the rich to the poor, state assets were privatised- including social housing, and the labour movement was crushed.

Before Thatcher and the conservatives came to power in 1979, 13.4% of the British population lived below the poverty line. By 1990, it had gone up to 22.2%. Unemployment hit levels not seen since the Great Depression, inequality rose and health outcomes became worse after cuts to the National Health Service and the deregulation of school meals. Famously she also ended a scheme that gave free milk to children, earning her the moniker “the milk snatcher”

The biggest resistance to the Thatcher government came from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who began a strike in 1984 in response to a mine closure. The strike lasted a full year, becoming one of the most important industrial struggles in living memory. Actions of solidarity with the striking miners came from around the

world, including Aotearoa. New Zealand Maritime workers donated nearly \$54,000 to the miners, as well as a ship-ping container full on lamb.

When the union found the only way they could procure a container of New Zealand meat was to buy it from the Meat Board in London, they were advised not to tell the board what the meat was for, as not to create a dispute with the government, but once it arrived general secretary Jim Slater announced the meat was for the “striking miners in their fight with that fascist Thatcher.”

“I’m having a drink to it right now” David Hopper, of the National Union of Mineworkers in northeast England, told media on the day she died “It’s a marvellous day. I’m absolutely delighted. It’s my 70th birthday today and it’s one of the best I’ve had in my life.”

Also despised for her foreign policy, Thatcher took the country to war with Argentina over the Falkland islands, at one point giving the order to sink a retreating ship, killing 323 people. She supported the apartheid government in South Africa and called Nelson Mandela a terrorist. She described Indonesian dictator Suharto as “one of our best and most valuable friends” and supported Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, who was also implementing neoliberal market reforms- while killing dissidents.

While people have celebrated in the streets some commentators have been more cynical, pointing out that Thatcher’s death hasn’t actually changed anything. Unfortunately, these commentators are largely correct. When asked what she considered her greatest achievement Margaret Thatcher is said to have answered “New Labour”. Indeed after gaining power the British Labour party did little to reverse the reforms of the Thatcher era.

In Britain today the Conservative led

government is implementing punitive welfare reforms, including the infamous “bedroom tax” where peoples welfare entitlements will be reduced if they have an unoccupied bedroom in their home. While lower than 1980s levels unemployment is still high and union membership remains low.

Here in New Zealand, a country where the Labour party didn’t just adopt neo-liberalism, it introduced it, the current National led government is privatising state assets, introducing the same sort of welfare reform as the UK, and presiding over a country with increasing inequality and poverty.

Any celebration of Thatcher’s death should really be a celebration of resistance to “Thatcherism” a resistance that is continuing- and must continue- today. Capitalist politicians will die, but until capitalism itself dies the issues of poverty and inequality will remain, this system is unlikely to again be able to offer the prosperity of the post war decades.

As for what remains of Thatcher herself, director Ken Loach has put it best; “How should we honour her? Let’s privatise her funeral, put it out to competitive tender and accept the cheapest bid. It’s what she would have wanted.”



Ae Marika! Tribute to Mike Kyriazopoulos

AE MARIKA is a weekly by Hone Harawira, leader of the MANA Movement and Member of Parliament for Te Tai Tokerau. This tribute, to Fightback comrade Mike Kyriazopoloulous, was originally published on Mana.net.nz

On Saturday night I was privileged to host my first ever citizenship ceremony as a Member of Parliament. The ceremony was for a good friend of mine, Mike Kyriazopoulos and his wife Joanne. Mike is a mix of Greek and Jewish ancestry, and used to live and work in England where he met his wife Joanne.

Their citizenship application was finally

approved a couple of weeks ago, and the ceremony was held at the Auckland Trades Hall in Auckland as part of a special tribute evening for Mike who is a committed socialist, a union activist, and chairman of the MANA branch of Te Raki Paewhenua.

Mike gave his oath of allegiance in Maori and followed that with his own personal vow to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the principles of international socialism.

The tribute part of the evening was because Mike has motor neurone disease which causes nerve cells to degenerate and muscles to waste away. Sufferers invariably end up unable to walk, speak, use their arms and hands, or hold up

their head. It has no known cause and is invariably fatal. Mike is not expected to live much longer.

Tributes flowed in from union activists and socialist comrades from around the world and from the many gathered for the evening, and ended with my wife Hilda getting all these staunch socialists to hold hands and each say something nice about Mike as part of a big karakia for him.

Mike is not a man given to much emotion, and his speech was one urging everyone to have clear purpose and a strong commitment to the future. A sad occasion but a great celebration nonetheless.



Mike (at the bottom of the picture with glasses on his forehead) at a protest outside of a National Party conference

FIGHTBACK 2013

A WEEKEND OF DISCUSSION AND
PLANNING FOR STRUGGLE,
SOLIDARITY AND SOCIALISM

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND
NEWTOWN COMMUNITY
AND CULTURAL CENTRE
WELLINGTON

31ST MAY - 1ST JUNE

Friday May 31st:

Newtown Community & Cultural Centre

6:30-8pm – Global situation: Crisis, Imperialism, Fightback

- Joel Cosgrove, Fightback
- Liam Flenady, Socialist Alliance (Australia)
- Mel Gregson, Socialist Party of Australia

3:10-4pm – Tino rangatiratanga and socialism

Jared Phillips

4:10-5pm – Where Next for Gender Liberation?

Kassie Hartendorp

5-6:30pm – Dinner break

6:30-8pm – Building an anti-capitalist movement in Australasia

- Rebecca Broad, Fightback
- Liam Flenady, Socialist Alliance (Australia) speaker
- Mel Gregson, Socialist Party of Australia
- Shomi Yoon, International Socialist Organisation (Aotearoa) speaker

Saturday June 1st:

Newtown Community & Cultural Centre

10-10:50am – Eco-Socialism or Barbarism

Daphne Lawless

11-11:50am – Workers, Unions and class struggle today

Grant Brookes, Heleyni Pratley

12-2pm: Lunch break

2-3pm – What is Marxism?

Ian Anderson

Sunday June 2nd

Writing workshop for Fightback members, and those who want to write for Fightback.

Text 022 3841917 for details.

